Food Security at the University of Richmond
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Introduction

The University of Richmond’s Strategic Plan states the University’s goal to be “to advance innovative practices that sustain our environmental, human, and financial resources” (2017). The University has also signed multiple national and global sustainability commitments such as the Talloires Declaration (2005), the American College and University President’s Climate Commitment (2007) and the American Campuses Act on Climate Pledge (2013). These commitments set ambitious climate action goals and address the responsibility of colleges and universities not only to cultivate an environmental consciousness on campus but also to transform the conventional operation systems on which college and universities depend (Andrejewski 2017). While the University has taken active steps to integrate sustainability into its academic, administrative, and operational practices, there remains room for improvements. We identified the University’s food system as one area of campus particularly vulnerable to changing climate conditions. Preceding by doing a low score (1.13 out of 7) on the University of Richmond’s 2017 Sustainability Report (Andrejewski 2017), this project seeks to both determine the current state of food security among students at the University as well as to analyze the larger context in which our food system is embedded.

A food system includes all the activities related to producing, procuring, trading, storing, packaging, wholesaling, retailing, consuming, and disposing of food (Bowers et al. 2013). While food systems influence human and environmental health all over the world, the United States’ conventional food system requires intensive capital and energy inputs. The impacts of this food system have been two-fold: on the one hand, food has become cheaper, more plentiful, and easier to access for the majority of the population, but also has resulted in environmental degradation, market exclusions of small and mid-scale producers, and has exacerbated inequities in food security (Hoppe 2014). Food security exists “when all people at all times have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (FAO 2012). Historically, evaluations of food insecurity on college campuses are few but emerging issues in the research of food systems have encouraged colleges to examine the state of food security on campus (Booth & Anderson 2016). In response to the problems caused by the conventional food system, local and sustainable food movements have championed alternative food systems through social justice with environmental stewardship (Feenstra 2002). In order for these programs to be successful, the University must have intellectual, social, political, and economic space that can facilitate resources and relationships (Feenstra 2002).

Methods

302 students responded to a 23 question survey, active for 24 days, covering topics such as demographics, food choice and access on campus, food awareness, and interest in food production. 52% of administrative coordinators, 47% of FVS and SES professors, and 33% of club presidents distributed the survey. Combined 3 semi-structured ethnographic interviews with university dining services staff in purchasing and residential dining, staff from Cichester Produce (University’s vendor for fruits and vegetables), and the CEO of Seasons Room (local community supported agricultural company).

Food Production Results

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### Survey Results

#### Food Availability

- 43% of students reported food insecurity
- 14% reported to never eat food within their last week
- 13% of students are concerned about running out of food

#### Food Access

- 42% of students reported to have a meal plan with Heilman Dining Hall swipes
- 21% have a part-time job to help pay for food
- 80% of students have purchased food on campus

#### Food Preferences

- 62% of students preferred a meal plan
- 31% of students reported they believe food is too expensive
- 30% of students reported they went hungry due to lack of food

#### Food Production

- 25% of students have participated in a food production project such as a garden
- 20% of students have worked at a local farm or market

### Assets and Recommendations

- **Social Space**
  - What we have
    - Campus Farm
  - What we recommend
    - Local Sustainable Food System
    - Expand gardens space ex: orchard along Gambill Mill

- **Political Space**
  - What we have
    - Graduate IR
  - Office for Sustainability
  - What we recommend
    - 1. Make the facilities of Graduate IR and Office for Sustainability more transparent and accessible
    - 2. Involve students, staff, and faculty to create guidelines for purchasing sustainable food
  - 5. Develop a food committee comprised of students, staff, and faculty

### Conclusions

Local and sustainable food movements are increasingly common and represent the future of our food system. Implementing these food frameworks on college campuses leads to less reliance on or displacement of contemporary intensive agricultural system while engaging students with sustainability and the fundamentals of food production. The results show 86% of students want more local and sustainable food options, 43% are interested in gardening, and 81% of students would buy produce at a campus farmers market at least once a month. For the future we want to encourage guidelines for sustainability, an across campus food committee, and more communication about food systems and how they operate environmentally, economically, politically, and socially. The recommendations suggested from our research will fulfill goals stated in the strategic plan and create meaningful cross disciplinary projects.